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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3987
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5517
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1308
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 003592

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [SN](#)
SUBJECT: PM A/S HILLEN DISCUSSES REGIONAL SECURITY ISSUES
WITH GOS

Classified By: E/P Counselor Ike Reed. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PM Assistant Secretary Dr. John Hillen briefed his interlocutors on U.S. efforts to promote regional security cooperation in Southeast Asia using a model that had been successful in the Gulf. Foreign Minister George Yeo responded enthusiastically and suggested including both security and non-security issues to make it more attractive politically. Chief of Defence Forces LG Ng Yat Chung said Singapore was working with New Zealand to develop a civilian-military package for a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan. FM Yeo said the coup in Thailand had severely damaged the country's institutions and that he was pessimistic about its structural stability. However, LG Ng thought the coup would help alleviate the problems in the south. End Summary.

¶2. (U) PM Assistant Secretary Dr. John Hillen, accompanied by the Ambassador, met November 1 with Singapore Minister of Foreign Affairs George Yeo and MFA Permanent Secretary Peter Ho. A/S Hillen also met with Chief of Defence Forces LG Ng Yat Chung and Security and Intelligence Division Director BG Chee Wee Kiong. A/S Hillen's delegation included BG John Toolan, Principal Director, Asian and Pacific Affairs, OSD/ISA, Caleb Weller, PM Special Assistant, and Jessica Powers, Country Director, OSD/ISA.

Promoting Regional Security Cooperation

¶3. (C) A/S Hillen briefed his interlocutors on U.S. efforts to promote regional security cooperation in Southeast Asia. In the Gulf, the United States had redesigned the basic regional security architecture by accelerating our bilateral cooperation in areas that lent themselves most to multilateral efforts: maritime security, counterterrorism, air and missile defense, and emergency response. A/S Hillen said the United States hoped to apply the same model to Southeast Asia, where a more top-down, institutional approach would not be effective. The United States planned to work with highly capable countries, such as Australia and Singapore, to help bring the other countries up to a higher level of collective security.

¶4. (C) Foreign Minister Yeo responded enthusiastically to the approach. He suggested including both traditional "hard" security issues as well as "soft" ones like environmental concerns to make it more politically attractive. MFA Permanent Secretary Peter Ho said it would be a challenge to get countries in the region to overcome their traditional

antipathy to working with others. One of the biggest "mental blocks" was the idea that cooperative security detracted from sovereignty. This was especially the case in Indonesia, Ho said. He suggested the United States "think outside the box" and work with China on this effort, rather than just rely on long-standing partners like Australia. China had a growing interest in maritime security to protect its oil imports.

PRT for Afghanistan

15. (C) Singapore was developing a civilian-military package for a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan, Chief of Defence Forces LG Ng told A/S Hillen. Singapore was working with New Zealand, with which it had long experience. LG Ng said the GOS was looking at a possible March 2007 target date to send its team. A/S Hillen thanked the GOS for its decision to support a PRT. He stressed the importance of expanding the authority of President Karzai into the provinces and said this would require a long-term investment from the international community. FM Yeo told A/S Hillen that it was important for Singapore to make contributions to Iraq and Afghanistan since it was important to symbolically back the United States.

Stability in Thailand

16. (C) The coup in Thailand had severely damaged the country's political institutions, FM Yeo said. He was pessimistic about Thailand's structural stability. FM Yeo said the King was old and in poor health and his son "lacked his touch." The insurgency in the south was a problem that

SINGAPORE 00003592 002 OF 002

was best managed and contained -- Thaksin had tried to solve it and only made matters worse, FM Yeo said. Thailand's new Prime Minister Surayud had told Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong that southern Thailand was a top priority for the government.

17. (C) Asked about the violence in southern Thailand, LG Ng said there was still no evidence that foreign elements were involved. However, violent groups in southern Thailand were learning new tactics from elsewhere. The coup would help alleviate the problems in the south, Ng argued, as the new government moved away from former Prime Minister Thaksin's hard-line policies.

Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia

18. (C) LG Ng said most Indonesians were moderate and secular, but extremist groups were gaining ground. The GOI had improved its technical ability to detect and deal with terrorist threats but there was still the question of political will. President Yudhoyono was constrained by domestic political realities from taking tougher measures against extremists.

19. (S) Asked about the terrorist threat in Malaysia, SID Director BG Chee said Malaysia's Special Branch was very capable and had done a lot of work in Sabah on counterterrorism. The Special Branch was concerned about links between groups in Sabah and in Indonesia and the Philippines. The problem was that the Special Branch was "distracted" by other issues and, for domestic political reasons, was forced to divert resources elsewhere, according to BG Chee.

Maritime Security

110. (C) LG Ng said Singapore wanted to continue promoting maritime security through the practical arrangements it has been developing with Indonesia and Malaysia. It would take

time to see results, however, since Malaysia and Indonesia didn't see it in their interest to have other players involved in this issue.

China and ASEAN

¶11. (C) Commenting on the commemoration of 15 years of dialogue between ASEAN and China hosted by China in Nanning in October, MFA Permanent Secretary Peter Ho said China knew how to impress its visitors. The "photos look great" even though there was "no substance" to the meetings.

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